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SUBJECT: BOSNIA -- MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS FREE, FAIR AND
ORDERLY

REF: SARAJEVO 1423

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Bosnia's October 5 municipal elections were conducted in an orderly manner with only minor irregularities at the polling stations. Turnout was low in some major cities such as Sarajevo (40 percent), but was considerably higher in rural areas such as Gacko (73 percent) and in towns such as Bijelina (59 percent) where the races were hotly contested. Results issued by the Central Election Commission in a press conference this morning are preliminary, and gave information only on mayoralty races and not on municipal council elections. If confirmed, these preliminary results suggest that Republika Srpska (RS) Prime Minister Milorad Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) succeeded in increasing the number of mayoralties under its control from 15 to close to 40, but failed to win in two RS cities it had specifically targeted: Bijelina and Doboje. The Bosniak Party for Democratic Action (SDA) maintained its dominance of Bosniak-majority municipalities. In Srebrenica, the Bosniak candidate from the SDA, Osman Suljic, is ahead in preliminary tallies. The SDA also appears to have won two mayoralties in Central Bosnia that had been controlled by Croat parties. In addition, the Croat party HDZ-1990 was unable to dent HDZ-BiH's grip on power in Croat-majority municipalities. HDZ-1990 appears to have won just three mayoralties. END SUMMARY

Few Irregularities

12. (SBU) Few serious irregularities at polling stations were reported by the Central Election Commission (CEC). A CEC official told us today that each municipality had at least one reported irregularity, but that virtually all were minor, and they would have little effect on the final outcome. The Embassy sent 10 observer teams to all regions of the country on election day and saw little evidence of problems. In spite of pre-election tensions in Doboje, our observers did not witness any irregularities there, nor, with the exception of occasional signs of family voting or slowness in opening polling stations, did they observe irregularities in other parts of the country.

13. (SBU) The Central Election Commission has established procedures for dealing with complaints, which can be filed by political parties for up to 30 days. A CEC official told us that if a serious complaint were to come to light, it would most likely occur when the ballots are transferred to Sarajevo for a second official counting. If the tally made by CEC officials in Sarajevo is significantly different from

the result reported by counters in a particular municipality on election night, this could result in the need to hold a new election in that municipality.

SNSD and the RS

¶4. (SBU) Preliminary results indicate that RS PM Dodik's SNSD improved its position in Republika Srpska, perhaps more than doubling the number of mayoralties his party holds from 15 to close to 40. Some of these new mayoralties are in the Eastern RS where Dodik's party traditionally has not been strong. On the other hand, despite strongly contesting the mayoralties in the second and third largest cities in the RS, Doboj and Bijelina, Dodik's party apparently was not able to beat the incumbent SDS candidates.

Success of SDA

¶5. (SBU) Media commentators have also noted the success of Sulejman Tihic's SDA, which clearly held on to its position as the dominant Bosniak party at the municipal level. The SDA apparently won some mayoral races in Central Bosnia that had Croat incumbents. The SDA also won in the municipality of old Sarajevo against an incumbent from a small party. Since SBH President Silajdzic has not made serious efforts to build a grass roots party that could contest mayoralties throughout the Federation, it is unclear whether the failure of his party in the municipal elections will have any significant impact on his political influence. The Social

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Democratic Party (SDP) lost two mayoralties and failed to gain any in Sarajevo.

Srebrenica

¶6. (SBU) According to initial indications, the Bosniak candidate from the SDA, Osman Suljic, received the most votes in the race for mayor of Srebrenica. His competition in the ranks of the Bosniaks, Hakiya Meholic, apparently did not draw as many Bosniak votes away from him as feared. The fact that Meholic's patron Nasir Oric, the former Bosniak military commander in Srebrenica, was arrested on October 3 for his activities as an organized crime kingpin may have taken some of the momentum out of Meholic's campaign.

Central Bosnia

¶7. (SBU) A few mayorships appear to have shifted hands from Croats to Bosniaks in Central Bosnia. It appears, for example, that the town of Novy Travnik may for the first time have elected a Bosniak mayor. How much these results reflect the drift of Croats from this area and how much they resulted from Croats splitting votes between HDZ BiH and HDZ 1990 is not yet clear from the results.

HDZ BiH versus HDZ 1990

¶8. (SBU) Some media observers have commented on the fact that HDZ-1990, which broke from HDZ-BiH, was able to win only three mayoralties. HDZ-BiH, on the other hand, won 16 mayoralties and beat some incumbents who had joined HDZ-1990 over the past several years. However, it is not yet clear what the composition of the municipal councils will be in these municipalities. If HDZ-1990 manages to capture a significant percentage of the seats in these assemblies, then it may continue to exercise strong influence on Croat politics there despite the inability to elect mayors.

Comment

19. (SBU) It is too early to draw significant conclusions from what are only preliminary municipal election results. It is clear that the elections were largely conducted in an orderly manner, however. The apparent success of the Bosniak candidate in Srebrenica, if confirmed, would mean that a crisis has been averted over "who lost Srebrenica" for the Bosniaks. Dodik's apparent, and surprising, success in smaller towns of the RS is partly counteracted by his party's apparent failure to win Doboj or Bijelina, but nonetheless is a trend that will likely have national implications. It is unclear whether the success of Tihic's SDA relative to Silajdic's SBiH among Bosniaks, or the apparent success of Covic's HDZ BiH relative to the HDZ 1990 will have any significant impact on the relative influence of these parties and leaders on the Bosnian political scene.

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